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Bay Conservation and Development Commission  
Metropolitan Transportation Commission

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## JOINT POLICY COMMITTEE — REGIONAL PLANNING PROGRAM

Date: February 1, 2008  
To: Joint Policy Committee  
From: Regional Planning Program Director  
Subject: Performance Criteria for Priority Development Areas

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At its meeting on January 18<sup>th</sup>, the JPC discussed various funding options for supporting FOCUS and the development of Priority Development Areas (PDAs). One conclusion of that discussion was that, regardless of source, any regional transportation funding going to PDAs should be accompanied by clear performance expectations relative to regional objectives. This memo is intended to lay out the basic content and structure of those expectations for the JPC's consideration.

Regional expectations for PDAs have to be sensitive to context. The Bay Area is composed of a variety of communities with different physical conditions and different community values. One size will definitely not fit all, and PDAs cannot be held to a single uniform performance target. However, it is possible to establish general metrics for assessing PDA performance and, within those criterion measures, to establish context-specific standards against which to judge individual PDAs. This memo identifies relevant general measures and potential sources for specific standards, but stops short of setting an array of individual performance targets at this time. Those individualized standards should be the subject of interest-based discussion and negotiation with our local-government PDA partners.

### Key Criterion Measure: Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT)

Focused (née smart) growth and the FOCUS program have a panoply of complementary objectives, from conserving land resources to revitalizing existing communities. However, we have considered supporting focused growth and its principal Bay Area manifestation, Priority Development Areas, using mostly transportation funds. Therefore, our prime measures of performance should be related to transportation impact. As transportation is also by far the largest generator of greenhouse gases in the Bay Area, concentrating on transportation measures directly supports what most consider to be our highest environmental imperative: climate protection.

The best summary measure of transportation impact is vehicle miles traveled (VMT). VMT captures at least three transportation objectives of focused growth: (1) reducing auto trip frequency, (2) reducing auto trip length, and (3) decreasing single-occupancy-vehicle (SOV) mode split (i.e., increasing the proportion of trips made through walking, biking, transit and car-

pooling). There is a body of empirical research which suggests that the kind of compact development we are encouraging for PDAs can have a significant effect on VMT. The consensus of a variety of studies<sup>1</sup>, supported by MTC's own TOD research, is that PDA-like communities will produce per capita VMT that is 20 to 40 percent less than that from typical suburban low-density, single-use residential subdivisions. Over time, that can exert considerable influence on growth in the region's transportation system needs and on greenhouse-gas emissions.

We are fortunate that there is emerging research and technology which can help us forecast VMT for various community development forms and understand how particular PDA plans will perform against this key criterion. The San Joaquin Valley's Air Pollution Control District is currently estimating community development VMT and associated air pollution impacts to help it implement its indirect source rule.<sup>2</sup> Measuring actual VMT to help us track progress and to calibrate our models is more problematic, but relatively straight-forward solutions could be available as this becomes a priority.

### Supporting Criteria

Minimizing VMT will generally require that PDAs measure well against a number of other more proximate criteria or likely preconditions for VMT reduction. It will be helpful for all concerned to assess PDAs against these supporting criteria as well. Some of the supporting criteria can be measured quantitatively; others will require a more qualitative and subjective assessment but are nonetheless important. Early in the process, these criteria are best expressed as questions to be asked of each PDA.

#### 1. Community Improvement

How was the plan for the PDA developed with community members to build upon existing assets, redress existing needs, and improve the area for both present and future residents?

A plan which enjoys the support of existing residents and which is perceived as an improvement will have long-term legs. Inclusive, neighborhood-level planning will reduce the imposition of singular projects which are opposed by current community members and which poison the receptivity to continuing development and change. Public infrastructure budgets and their justification will provide important information on how communities have planned positively for change.

#### 2. Housing Choice

How does the plan for the PDA help expand the overall quantity of housing, increasing tenure, affordability, form and density choices for the area and for the region?

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<sup>1</sup> Summarized in R. Ewing, K. Bartholomew, S. Winkelman, J. Walters and D. Chen; *Growing Cooler: The Evidence on Urban Development and Climate Change*; Urban Land Institute, October 2007.

<sup>2</sup> See Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates, *Crediting Low-Traffic Development: Adjusting Site-Level Vehicle Trip Generation Using URBEMIS*, August 2005, and [www.valleyair.org](http://www.valleyair.org).

Community diversity can help reduce travel. Those who are employed in the area and serve its residents should have affordable housing opportunities so that they can live near where they work. The number of housing units by type and affordability class will be an important quantitative measure of PDA performance, as will jobs/housing balance by occupational type.

### 3. Transportation Choice

How does the plan for the PDA, through the provision of infrastructure and through the location, mixture and intensity of land uses, facilitate walking, bicycling and transit alternatives to single-occupant automobile travel?

Community design and use mix will need to be assessed qualitatively relative to the general objective of building complete communities near quality transit. National research provides us with a comparative and quantitative basis through which to assess density and other measures of land-use intensity relative to the optimum use of the transit infrastructure serving the area.<sup>3</sup> Unit density is a critical quantitative indicator of performance.

### 4. Land-use compatibility

How does the PDA plan address adjacency issues and respect potentially conflicting but essential land-use and circulation functions?

In addition to reducing VMT, PDAs should recognize other regional objectives including those related to economic diversity and resiliency, goods distribution, and localized air pollution.

### 5. Sustainability

How does the PDA plan address and balance each of the three e's—economy, equity, and environment—to ensure net positive benefits for each?

While we cannot expect any local plan to solve all the region's problems, we should be able to clearly see that it was not developed narrowly using a head-in-the-sand paradigm. In sum, the plan should respond in a demonstrable manner to the pressing challenges of the Bay Area in the twenty-first century. It should contribute to the continuation of a strong economy, help increase access to economic benefits for all segments of Bay Area society, and facilitate a reduction in our environmental footprint.

### Use of Performance Criteria

The criteria identified in this memo, and other similar criteria if appropriate, will have three principal uses as the FOCUS program moves forward:

1. Provide a comparative basis for assessing PDAs in the competition for limited regional funds (Those PDAs that score well against other roughly comparable PDAs on the

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<sup>3</sup> See Metropolitan Transportation Commission, *Station Area Planning Manual*, October 18, 2007

quantitative metrics and which provide compelling answers to the qualitative questions should be most competitive for and deserving of regional support.);

2. Help direct regional funds to those expenditure categories and specific projects within PDAs that contribute most to regional objectives (e.g., pedestrian connections, not food and wine centers);
3. Provide a basis by which to tangibly measure and evaluate progress and against which to chart and navigate program improvements as FOCUS moves forward.

### Next Steps and Recommendation

FOCUS is not just another top-down funding program, but is intended to be a partnership among the regional agencies and local governments. Therefore, it is appropriate to consult with our local partners on the general nature and structure of criteria before proceeding further. This consultation should proceed through a variety of forums, including the multi-jurisdiction working group currently advising the FOCUS program and county-level meetings of officials representing PDA jurisdictions.

It is also appropriate to have discussions with local elected officials from throughout the region, whether they represent PDAs or not. As funds are allocated to PDAs, it is important for everyone to understand the purposes and expectations attached to these funds.

At the JPC's suggestion, we are currently organizing county meetings of elected officials to talk about performance targets for ABAG's *Projections 2009*. The performance criteria for PDAs are complementary to the regional performance targets, and it makes sense to talk about both at the same meetings. As the PDA criteria may directly influence the award of funds to local areas, the elected-official discussion at the county level is likely to be more real and grounded than a discussion directed solely at the more abstract performance targets for *Projections*. The potential for money will also likely attract many more to attend.

Accordingly, I RECOMMEND:

THAT the JPC endorse the general content and structure of PDA performance criteria, as outlined in this memo, for discussion with local elected and appointed officials in association with the discussion on performance targets for *Projections 2009*.